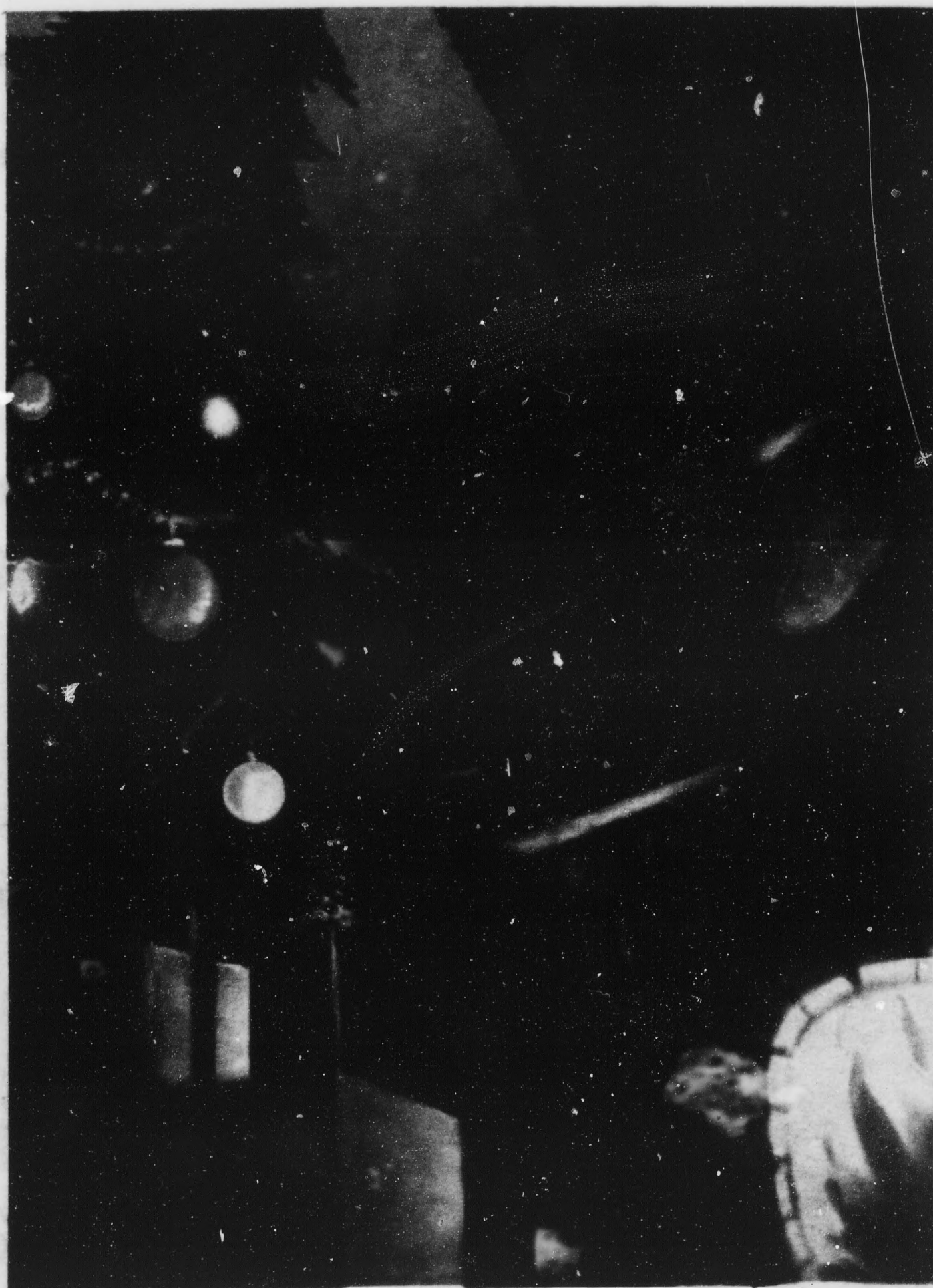


# THE UNIVERSITY Review



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1991





PHOTO BY GLENN TAGUMA

# THE UNIVERSITY Review

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I also want to say hi to my grandmother in Phoenix, AZ, who'd better be reading those issues of the State Hornet I send her.  
Ignore the gloomy mood of this UR; we had stuff left over from the Halloween issue.

POEM BY S. MARCEL DUGGAN

## Are you afraid to fly

Are you afraid to fly  
Among the trees  
As the birds softly sing

Are you afraid to fly  
through the clouds  
As the rain stands to applaud

Are you afraid to fly  
to the other side  
As the wind slowly calls your name

Are you afraid to fly  
And holds the tears  
Until everyone has gone

Are you afraid to fly  
And fear the unknown  
or because you've never tried

Are you afraid to fly  
Are you afraid to fly





# Carpe Diem

**I**talian love to dance. In the July moonlight, on a dance floor assembled in a grassy park, they were doing just that. Couples turned and spun in the bonfire's glow, an oasis of light among the towering pines and chestnuts. The melody of a lively Venetian waltz mingled with the banquet's clamor some yards away. Picnic tables were set together under a low-hanging tent as barbecue smoke breathed the scent of sausages and grilling polenta. From everywhere came voices, Italian voices — some harsh and guttural, some soft and smooth. It was like a carnival of sorts, everything centered around that one, wooden dance floor.

It was the summer of '89 and we were at the Festa de San Zenone in the northeast region of Italy. Kyle, Chris and I, best friends since high school, were fulfilling a pledge to travel through Europe together. The evening at the festival was the night before leaving the safety of my cousins' hospitality to hazard the Italian Riviera. Though this festival occurred annually, after a couple of German beers — dancers gliding in choreographed animation on the crowded dance floor — it seemed like this was an elaborate cinematic backdrop, its plot concocted for our design. This was the shining climax of two weeks spent with relatives, and while unknown dangers loomed on the horizon, that night it seemed anything was possible.

It was for that reason that Kyle decided the evening would be incomplete without dancing. Scanning the crowd, he spotted a dark-haired Italian woman about our age and, armed with an Italian phrase I taught him, wandered over to ask her to dance. While it only took a minute to locate her in the crowd, it took many times that long to approach her. The tension was unbelievable as he stood only yards away, waiting for the crowd of friends around her to disperse. Forty-five agonizing minutes later, he was finally talking to her. Her name was Melissa and after a few pantomimed gestures, she understood his invitation to dance. But what Kyle didn't realize as he took Melissa's hand was that American dancing and dancing the waltz were two different things.

It is a powerful image — an American and an Italian surrounded by swirling dancers, stars above, themselves swirling, and

the American completely unable to dance. Melissa's face flushed in embarrassment at the realization that Kyle couldn't waltz. Suddenly, a lumpy blonde woman grabbed Kyle as her bony German husband began to count in Kyle's face, "Einz, tsei, drie," over and over, like waltz paramedics. Before Kyle could do anything about it — did this really happen? — a midget in a bad toupee grabbed Melissa and spiraled away with her.

*Carpe diem* is Latin, meaning "to catch the day." The phrase implies a recommendation to seize the opportunities that life spontaneously presents. Kyle's experience taught me that, as a credo, *carpe diem* was flawed. The evening could have been a great success had Kyle resisted the urge to dance. I would never understand the true meaning of seizing the day until I was faced with my own challenge.

Every once in a great while, a person meets someone to whom they are instantly attracted. It is not necessarily extraordinary beauty that causes this spark, but something indescribable that makes this new acquaintance stand out from the crowd like words highlighted on a page. This happened to me my first semester at Sac State in my sociology class. I still recall her white cotton shirt that emphasized the details in her face like a blank canvas with a delicate portrait painted in its center. Her auburn hair glowed red against the light of an uncurtained window and when she smiled, a sweet glow caught in her bright, hazel eyes.

Her name was Heidi Nelson, and everything about her captivated me — she carried herself in a powerful manner, yet she had a friendly, accepting demeanor. Her gaze always demonstrated an attentive ear and a sharp, observant intellect. And while I only spoke to her a few times, I decided that before the semester's end, I would tell her what a great lady she was. My plan was not to attract attention to myself so much as to express my unspoken adoration. My purpose was a simple attempt to brighten her day.

It was after my trip to Italy when the opportunity to talk to her arose. In months I would graduate, but my infatuation for Heidi had not diminished. I always regretted not getting to know her when I had the chance and decided if the opportunity materialized, I would tell her what I did not have the courage to reveal to her years earlier.



My moment came as I was wandering toward the library one afternoon. The flash of red hair revealed Heidi's presence among the students congregating in the middle of the quad. For the first time since I decided to talk to her, she was not surrounded by an audience of sorority sisters. This was the perfect opportunity. I suddenly understood that, like planets aligning or toast not burning, this was it — The Moment — and if I didn't act immediately, I probably never would. Even as I approached her I knew that if I thought about what I was doing, it would be all over.

*Don't think*, I told myself, sitting next to her, *just act*.

I never considered how strange it must have sounded until I was talking to her — a guy in one of her classes three years ago finally introducing himself. Internally, I had rehearsed what I had wanted to say countless times, but now I was actually talking to her. Every speech, everything I had planned to tell her was instantly lost when her eyes met mine and for reasons I only understood later, instead of telling her what an attractive, fantastic person she was, I asked her to lunch.

"My boyfriend might not appreciate that," she asserted politely.

The thought that she had a boyfriend never concerned me since I had not in-

tended to ask her out. My instinctive reaction at that point was to make a quick exit, but I had wanted to tell her in the first place. And though the words were not as eloquent as I had imagined, it was fantastic to talk to her.

I don't know what she thought, but she thanked me, and our conversation continued. She was as friendly as I remembered, and when we parted I renewed my lunch offer.

"I would really like to get to know you as a friend," I added.

Smiling, she agreed.

It was only later that I realized why I had asked her to lunch instead of following my prearranged speech. Had I just revealed my infatuation for her, I would have always wondered what it would have been like to get to know her. I had always regretted not talking to her in my sociology class, and it would have continued to bother me had I not at least attempted to become her friend. And while we never did eat lunch together, at least I had tried.

Now I realize that the importance of *carpe diem* is not the result but the attempt — not just thinking, but acting. The formula for seizing the day is simply a matter of not looking at the possible things that could go wrong, but concentrating on what might just go right.



# POPPY

**I** always thought that I was a pretty normal child; good solid family background, good schools ... you know the routine. I had always been an achiever in school and athletics, and was always pretty popular with my classmates. However, all that came crashing to the ground the other day, as something happened to me that made me start to think more about myself.

I am currently a senior at Bloody Mary Martha's School for the Extremely Talented: 4.0 grades, all-city football, track, *et cetera*. I play quarterback on the football team. I never really got into drugs and always considered people who did to be low-lives. There always was a curiosity for pot, however, and when a friend of mine came to me and asked, "Hey Mike, wanna get loaded?" I replied with a resounding "Yeah, why not?"

Ever since that first day, I virtually fell in love with marijuana. I didn't consider myself a stoner though, since I am a jock and all.

One night after a football game, that same friend asked if I would really like to soar. I was a bit apprehensive at first, as I really didn't want to experiment any further than pot.

"Aw c'mon, just try it. You'll love it, Mike. All we have to do is smoke this hooter..."

"I don't know... What's it called?" I asked.

"Angel dust," my buddy grinned.

Angel dust. How could something with such a heavenly name be all that bad? I took a puff. "What's the big deal?" I thought.

Soon after, I headed home and I went to my room to fly in peace. I was looking through my yearbook when I saw the most beautiful girl in our whole school, Sally Hootmyer. I had always admired her beauty. She had long flowing hair, big blue eyes, creamy white skin, and oh, what a body—but of bashfulness I had never gotten to know her.

Then suddenly things got really weird. As I gazed into her



ART BY MICHAEL COSPER

**A**ngel dust. How could something with such a heavenly name be all that bad?

enchanted eyes, they turned into something of the devil, glaring at me as if she was alive on the page trying to sear through me with them. Then she jumped out of the book and started transforming into the most horrid demon the mind could ever imagine. Next, as her metamorphosis became complete, she began shouting the most obscene words at me, words that I don't think I've ever been exposed to before.

It was awful. I was terrified beyond any fear I had ever known, and at that moment I think I lost my mind. I threw anything and everything in the hopes to crush

the little monster, but she dodged every attempt. In the process, I destroyed my whole house with a ferocity never before known to me. Finally, a voice in my head told me what to do. So, under the instructions, I desperately bit my tongue to get the saliva to come and squirted a jet of spit at her. She dodged again. I held it back until I could get a clear shot at her.

It took several tries. Luckily I had plenty of ammo, as I had been drooling as I looked at her photo earlier that night. I finally nailed her as she ran across my desk. I spat with every drop of saliva I had. I watched in amazement, my

mouth dry and my tongue swelling, as Sally Hootmyer dissolved into a green, bubbling liquid which flowed across my desk and dripped onto the floor. The term paper which I had been working on for six weeks was ruined, but that's OK; I could blame my dog. Utterly relieved of this horror, I became dizzy, went black, and passed out.

When I came to, I had forgotten what had happened to me. All I saw was my house destroyed, everything strewn about, and smelling like a toilet. "Shit, that must have been some party," I said to myself.

I shrugged it off and got ready for school. After all, I had the big game to prepare for. Aside from having to virtually rebuild my house, my life was pretty normal all week ... that is, until the big game came along.

We were playing our cross-town rivals in our annual face-off. This was always a good match-up, and the whole season was on the line. We were holding our own all night, but remained behind on the scoreboard. It was the final minutes of the fourth quarter and we were down by two points; all I had to do was get the ball into field goal range. I needed at least twenty more yards so the skinny little runt whom we call a field goal kicker could put in his 10 second contribution and score the winning three points. It was fourth down, and we had to go for it. The crowd seemed to go silent as the ball was snapped.

The chain of events that happened next was to change my life from that point on. It all seemed to happen in slow motion, but I'll try to describe my fuzzy recollection of the whole scene.

I ran around the end, running for my life, trying to find an open receiver. I looked to the outside, and that's when I saw her. She was sitting in about the third row. That hair, that skin, and those beautiful eyes—it was Sally Hootmyer in the flesh! She was standing, shouting, and to my surprised eyes, transforming into that little green demon which terrified me only days before.

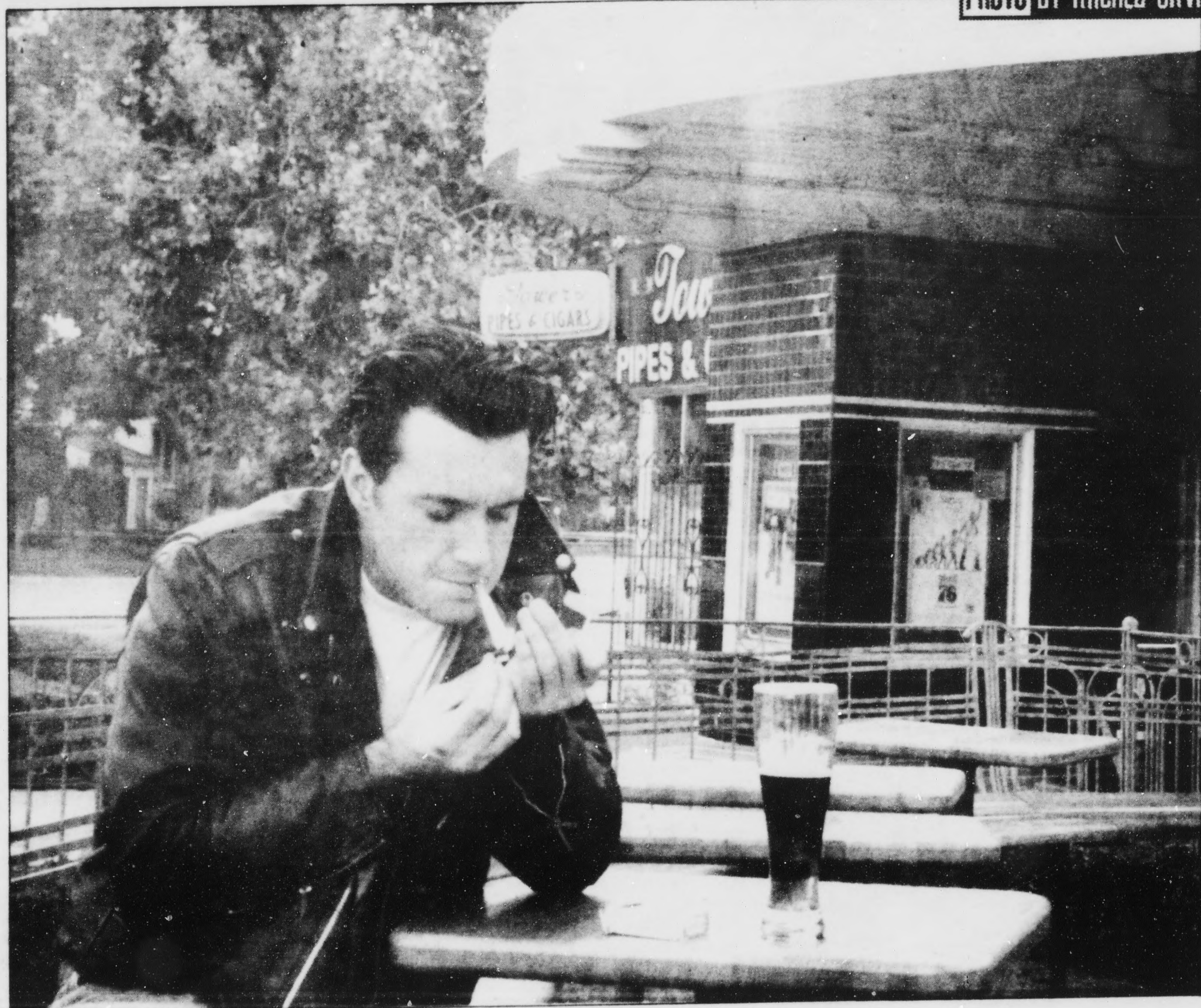
Well, I knew the game was on the line, but I also knew that I couldn't allow this thing to torment me any further, so I did what I thought best. I immediately, to the amazement of my teammates, coaches, and everyone else in the crowd, ran off the field, hurdled over the bench, leaped over the rail and started towards Sally. At this point, the time had expired in the game, but that was the last thing on my mind as I was going to take care of this problem once and for all.

At point blank range I threw

See Poppy, page 5



PHOTO BY RACHEL ORVINO



Poppy, from page 4

the football at her face, immediately knocking her off her seat. I reached deep within my mind to try and remember how I had gotten rid of her before. Suddenly it came to me; I knew what I had to do! I ferociously bit my tongue hard enough to draw blood, and to buy time, I tore off my mouth guard to pour its contents on her, unconcerned about the thousands of people staring at me with gaping jaws.

"FREEZE!" thundered the police officer as he whipped out his pistol. And before one drop of spit could hit Sally Hootmyer's face, I was shot.

My left buttock felt like it was on fire, the flames burning as hot as the hell which this little devil came from. Suddenly, I was thrust back into reality. There was no demon menacing me, only Sally Hootmyer, the most beautiful girl in the whole school, trembling before me in front of 3,000 people, as I foamed at the mouth.

As soon as I realized I was shot, I fainted, and ended up in jail. Eventually I made it out and into a psychiatric ward at my neighborhood hospital. I still don't understand why this happened to me. Maybe it was the angel dust that I smoked or something. The doctors keep saying that I'm a drug addict, but they don't know shit. Oh well, at least I get to visit my mom, and get to go outside once a day.

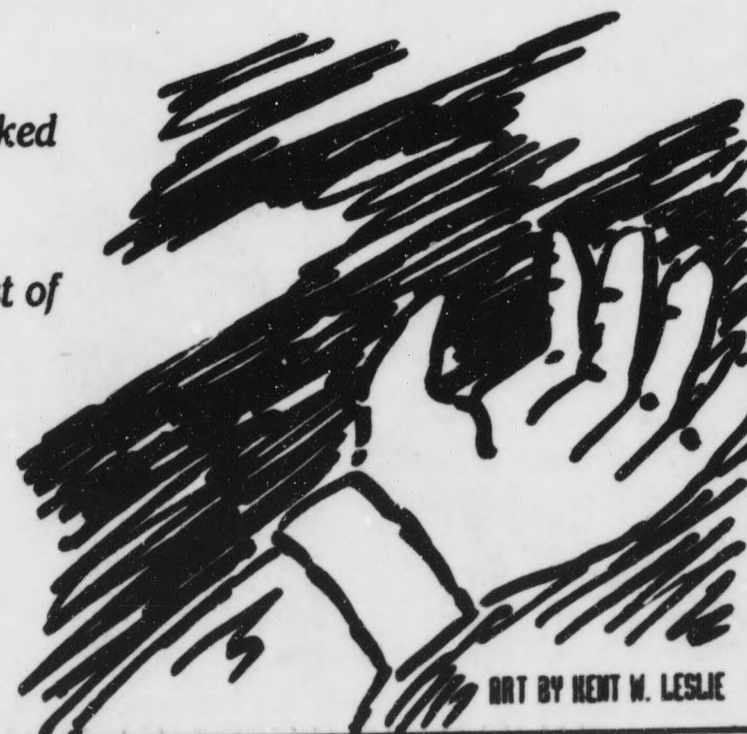
I sure wish I had a joint though.

UR

POEM BY JOSHUA LURIE-TERRELL

*i was sleeping just now  
and I remembered this one time when  
me and dad were riding somewhere on  
the horses  
and i saw a man  
he was lying in the sand he looked  
awfully old  
his hand was gone and where  
i looked for flesh there was a twist of  
white  
and a streak of brown  
dad said the man was dead  
but i know the truth  
i know where he went to  
i know when he's coming back*

## For Dad



ART BY NENT W. LESLIE



ART BY JOSE LOTT

FICTION BY DAN THOMAS

# Yes, this is CHRISTMAS

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THE UNIVERSITY REVIEW

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1991

I was lying alone in my bed, on the night of Christmas Eve. Not a creature was stirring but me and my hand, wishing and longing for the girl of my dreams. I no longer believed in Santa Claus — Christmas is the worst of capitalism.

My father was asleep with a cigarette in his hand. Luckily, it was burnt out. My mother was laying beside him in old tattered lingerie. My father was a cheap bastard. And my sister lay naked, I believe, with a boy down the street. What a wonderful family.

I heard the patter of footsteps on the roof and I wondered what the hell it could be. I stalked out of my room, past the closed doors of my family's rooms, towards the stairwell. I sat at the top of the stairs, hiding from the Christmas tree's twinkling lights. Hues of green and red showered the bare walls. My mother wasn't much for decorations.

Ash began to fall down the fireplace, and I heard this OOOMPH, AUGH, groaning sound. I thought to myself, *Maybe I shouldn't have had a couple of martinis before bed. James Bond doesn't. And suddenly a man appeared.*

He didn't look much like the capitalistic Santa Claus, who is old, jolly, fat, and wears a red suit. This guy had tattoos on his arms and knees, scratched his jock and his scraggly beard, and then pulled out a bottle of scotch. Taking a hefty swig, he wandered over to our lone family stocking and began eating the candy.

Santa, I think, now done with our candy, his bottle of scotch put away, sat down into my dad's

favorite La-Z-Boy recliner and began taking long slow drags on cloves. The smell was making my mouth water. Hacking and coughing, Santa woke my dog, Carl. Carl, a trained Rottweiler, jumped for the throat of Santa. With a snap of Santa's fingers, the front door flew open, and Carl flew out into the cold night.

This pissed me off. Not only did he throw my dog out, but I just realized Santa didn't even have a bag overflowing with presents for the nice boys and girls of the world.

I cleared my throat and started down the stairs, still thinking this was a bad dream. Santa laughed. My manliness was hanging out of my boxers. I shrugged, put it back in and continued down the steps.

"Who the hell are you?" I asked, feeling stupid.

"Well, who do you think I am?" Santa replied.

"You can't be Santa Claus, because there really isn't one."

Handing me a clove cigarette, Santa said, "Are you sure?"

"Well, let me touch you," I asked, taking the cigarette, which was real. And I gave him a jab to the ribs. "You sure seem real, but how do I know this isn't a dream?"

Santa turned around with a twinkle in his eyes and came back with a fist to my face. I fell to the ground with an aching jaw, and realized this couldn't be a bad dream influenced by too many martinis.

"Well, what now?" I groaned, climbing up off the floor.

"Let's jam to some music. You like punk music, Scotty?"

Shit, he knows my name. I was truly amazed. He *must* be Santa Claus... or should I say Slick Nick?

"Sure, punk's good, Santa."

We jammed to Sublime. "I can see through your lies/You're just a crock of shit with a pretty smile..." We filled the air with clove smoke, sat, drank and then jammed some more. Life was good. Life was wonderful.

"It's time for me to go and fuck with some other young delinquent, Scotty," Santa said, as he headed for the front door.

"Why are you going out the front door?" I asked. "What about Rudolph and the others?"

Santa belched, then laughed with a jolly old laugh. "Shit, boy, I drive a '57 Caddy." With a snap of his fingers, I saw him roar down the street with a trail of exhaust smoke filling the starry sky. I walked towards the door, shivering in my boxers, and closed it after letting Carl back in.

Not wanting to believe anything that had happened, I headed for my room. The stairs seemed dizzying; the alcohol was taking effect. I looked at the closed door of my sister's room and wished the boy down the street the best of luck. Then I looked at my parents' door and felt sorry for their miserable, worthless lives. But at least they had each other. Then on to my room.

A radiation sign hanging on my door welcomed me into my bubble-lit room. The burning lava light brought me back to reality, for the full life essence of a nude female blow-up doll was laying on my bed. A note attached read: "Happy dreams and enjoy, Scotty." It was signed, "Santa."

Life was wonderful with my blow up doll, and I now believed. "Thanks a lot, Slick Nick," I whispered as I fell asleep. UR

**H**e didn't look much like the capitalistic Santa Claus...



FICTION BY CHRIS WOOLSEY

# NEW AGE REAPER

PHOTO BY LORI JOHNSON

**T**he Oakmoor Mall doors flew open and a boy emerged from the cocoon of darkness and noise into the sunlight and spread his wings. His name is Michael Thorton, but that is of little importance as he will soon be dead.

Michael sat down on one of the many wooden benches that littered the area surrounding the outside of the mall. He opened the bag from the bookstore and peered inside to see how many books he had lost on the way out. Surprisingly enough, they were all still in the bag, staring up at him. A western for his father, a science fiction novel and a horror collection for himself. He had been doing a lot of absent-minded things lately and just wanted to make sure he hadn't added any to the list.

Looking up at the sky, he could see a few lazy clouds go by at their own leisure. The sky was a brilliant blue that stung his eyes, as they had still not adjusted to the light outside. *Better get goin'*, Mike thought to himself as he got up and started towards the bike rack.

His unlocking of the bicycle's chain was interrupted by the sound of a ringing phone. It must have been coming from the phone booth that stood right next to the bike rack. He stepped inside and quickly picked up the receiver.

"Hello, Michael," the voice on the other end simply reeked with an English accent. He slowly pulled it away from his face and stared at it in disbelief. The other end of the line was composed of a cacophony of static, refusing to utter any other message or give a clue to the identity of the speaker.

It was not the message that bothered Michael so much as the voice of the speaker. It sounded dark and polished, cold and impersonal, like a snake that had emerged from the speaker and wound its way down the receiver, across his arm, and took a firm

grip around his neck. He slowly hung up and walked back to his unlocked bicycle.

As he pedaled down the sidewalk, his presently morbid thoughts turned to more happy ones. The items in his sack always brought him a great deal of joy, for if he wasn't out with his friends or doing his homework, he was reading a book. If he didn't have a good book to read, he was frantic, always thinking that some-

"AS HE  
CONTINUED  
HIS VOICE  
TOOK ON A  
DISTINCTLY  
BRITISH  
SLANT.  
'MICHAEL,  
ISN'T IT  
ABOUT  
TIME?'"

thing was out of place. As soon as he got home he would hit the couch with a soda and rip into his new books.

These comforting thoughts wafted through his head as he traveled down the road, growing ever closer to a nearby intersection. *BUS COMING!* Mike ignored his mind's message and continued his daydreaming. All the time, the bus moved closer.

Inside the bus, the driver, one Norman Stemenblocker, adjusted the rear-view mirror in order to get a better shot of the cute little number who was sitting behind him. *CHILD ON BICYCLE!* Norman chose to ignore this important news flash. Finding the mirror's position to suit his purpose, his eyes hesitantly returned back to

the road.

Both boy and driver were snapped back to real life at the same instant. Norman and Michael slammed on their brakes and braced for impact.

Michael actually almost cleared the path of the huge projectile, but, unfortunately for him, his back tire didn't quite make it. It collided with the left corner of the front bumper and that's all she wrote. He helicoptered for a split second before crashing to the ground below.

"Kid, kid? You all right?" He heard the wooshing sound of the bus's door opening and the next thing he knew someone was shaking him and screaming into his face. "Kid, are you OK?"

As Michael's vision began to clear, he could see that he was being revived by a greasy-looking fat man who wore a funny blue hat. Michael nearly got sick to his stomach, both from the carousel of scenery spinning madly about him, but also from the sight of the sweat running down the driver's face and dripping down onto his own. "Sorry about that, kid, ya jumped out right in front of me. Didn't see ya till it was too late. Your butt wassa movin'!" He stopped for a moment and seemed to ponder this last statement. He laughed out loud, apparently proud of his eloquent language. Among other things, the odor of alcohol drifted through the stale air.

"Let's go, get up. You're fine!" And with that he grabbed Michael under the arm and jerked him off the road.

Passengers had exited the bus and were milling around out front. "That's it, everyone back inside; show's over," the driver yelled and began to wave his hands above his head.

With the passengers back inside, he leaned out the window, said, "Sorry again, kid," and made

See *Reaper*, page 11



POEM BY JENNIFER TAKOS

## GAMES

the outcome  
a mystery

the game  
survives on uncertainty

black to white  
white to black  
forgetting the rainbow in between

never knowing when  
never knowing where  
never knowing how

black to white  
white to black

white to black  
black to white

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THE UNIVERSITY REVIEW

December  
1991



# A PIG TOOK MY PLACE

I called home that afternoon, just before leaving work, to make sure my roommate had a pint of Chivas iced up and waiting in my bedroom, but the tone in his voice as he answered the phone made me suspicious.

"Uh, no, maybe you shouldn't come home... There were these men in black, and this crazed woman... I think it's a surprise," he whispered inanely.

"What the hell is going on? What the fuck happened? You let men in black into our HOUSE?" I screamed into the cheap telephone so loudly it began to smoke in my hand.

"They said they were from Reno. They said you used to work for them. They had a box. A really b-big box. And it was steaming. I had to—"

"RENO? I don't know anyone in Reno. They're all twisted up there. What was in the box?" He was really starting to piss me off, but he's a good man, a sane man; this must really have been some bad craziness to trip him out so badly.

"It's a pig's head," he whispered coarsely, "there is a fucking giant 30 pound pig's head on your bed, in an ice-filled box. It has nails in it. It has screws in it. Get it the fuck out of the house, you weasel! I knew this was going to happen! I'm starting to wonder about your friends — the drugs, I can handle the drugs, but a fucking pig's head! I think you need a vacation!" He was truly out of control now, and I knew there were two things I was going to have to do, or maybe three: Get rid of the pig's head, kill the Men in Black and their assistant and maybe my roommate too, and have a drink. Have a few drinks.

I roared home at speeds far exceeding the posted limit, which is not easy to do,

seeing as I live three blocks away from my office. As I burst into my bedroom, my sacred castle, my inner sanctum, I saw the frosty beast. It peered up at me with one frost-covered dead purple eyeball. The other one was impaled with a construction spike; one of those six-inch stainless steel deals that are as sharp as... well, construction spikes, and about an inch around.

I felt the bile rise from my stomach. I knew who had done it. It was that insane drug lord Chris Murdock from Oakland, also known as Fat City; Quaker State Tapioca, the vicious and plotting editor of Pigdog Journal; and one of their leather wicca lackeys. They never go anywhere without one of those sickening twisted women, dressed all in black, looking like models from fetishist catalogs, who parade around obnoxiously in their razor-toothed chastity belts.

I thought of revenge, of pouring liquid Drano into the gas tank of Murdock's supercharged beyond-the-legal-limit Mustang and watching as he burst into a screaming fireball of death when he hit 120 on the freeway, which he was sure to do by the next morning. Such thoughts were quickly shelved for future reference when I remembered that he traveled with a large Samoan named Moses who itched continuously for fresh blood and had a \$200 a day Fentanyl and meth habit. Dammit, the last time Moses ripped my limbs from my body and threw them to the circling sharks it took me

over a year to recuperate — not counting those three months in a Turkish prison.

I lugged the loathsome pork remainder out to the neighbor's dumpster, but decided at the last minute to leave it on their porch instead with a note that read, "Dear Brenda: It's all over. I can't live in constant fear of being killed by your jealous husband any longer. Love, Bryce." It made no sense, but it might slow their annoying fits of rutting which had so often kept me awake all night, even with my ears stuffed full of cotton and my gullet full of whiskey and rum. I even signed the fictional Bryce's name with pig's blood, a beautiful final touch.

Revenge was the next item on my list. Murdock, the obvious ringleader, was out, as I didn't want to be turned into fleshy pulp by Moses again. I'd go after QST. The man

was a sickening flesh-puppet who thought he was a serious journalist. Well, Quaker, let's see who's the most sick and twisted this time, you satanic swine-worshipping scumbag.

I gathered the necessary tools — the lukewarm Chivas, which my soon-to-be-dead roommate didn't even bother to stick in the fridge (he'll pay later), a quarter of the purest Bolivian coke ever snorted on this continent — the kind that leaves a lemon banana taste down the back of your throat — and a pack of cigarettes. Tonight I was going to be an American Hero.

Of course, I soon returned to my senses, did the coke in one monstrous line across my kitchen counter, and have now finished recording this amazing true-life story in the time it took to smoke one Export-A, exactly. **UR**

FICTION BY JOSHUA LURIE-TERRELL



"THEY SAID  
THEY WERE  
FROM RENO.  
THEY SAID YOU  
USED TO WORK  
FOR THEM.  
THEY HAD A  
BOX. A REALLY  
B-BIG BOX. AND  
IT WAS  
STEAMING."

ART BY JOSE LOTT

POEM BY W.J. JAMES

## BUSH IN '92

Don't do drugs.  
Build a bomb.  
Start a war.  
Kill Saddam.

Can't have sex.  
You'll get AIDS.  
Might as well  
Throw grenades.



# Neighbors

**A**uthor's note: George Bernard Shaw did it, and I don't see why I can't. Therefore, here is a play that was not so much written for the stage as it was written to be read. In fact, we can raise it to a new form of participatory drama if you get a partner and read the lines to one another. Right now. Even if you're in the middle of your biology class and you're dissecting a worm, I want you to get a partner and read this play. Begin here:

**Sarah.** (Breathlessly.) Hi, I'm Sarah Ellis. I just moved in next door. My heater broke and I was wondering if I could stay here for just a while 'til my husband gets home. It's really cold out.

**Parker.** Sure.

**Sarah.** I hope I'm not bothering you, but I could actually see my breath in there, and I don't want to freeze to death in my own house. My parents froze to death in their house, and my sister had a terrible time chipping them out of their bed. My husband should be back in an hour or so.

**Parker.** Would you like some coffee?

**Sarah.** Yes, thanks.

**Parker.** I'd just made some... actually, I like tea. Mother always liked tea, but she's dead now, too. Died in a luge accident. How do you like it?

**Sarah.** It sounds horrible.

**Parker.** The coffee?

**Sarah.** No, the luge accident.

I'm sorry, I misunderstood. Just sugar, please. (Pause.) You seem to be our only neighbor. What do you do?

**Parker.** I'm an artist. I paint. I suppose you want to see some of my paintings.

**Sarah.** Sure.

**Parker.** No big surprise. What do you think of this one?

(At this point, perhaps I should explain that he uncovers an easel on which is displayed a painting of a dark, hooded figure in front of a gloomy sea, with lightning and thunder in the background.)

**Parker.** It's one of my cheerier paintings.

**Sarah.** (Aghast.) Where does that come from? How do you get into that kind of mood?

**Parker.** Oh, it's little things. Like last weekend, just when I decided to start work on another painting—this one, as a matter of

fact. I had to get into the mood, so I went to the theater and I brought some gasoline and matches.

**Sarah.** The theater?

**Parker.** It was a Steven Segal movie, the kind where he kills anything that moves. It was really violent and got my adrenalin pumping. After I saw it, I knew I had to rush right home and start painting.

**Sarah.** Oh.

**Parker.** But first I had to set the theater on fire.

**Sarah.** What?

**Parker.** Don't worry, I got out of there in time. Those silly people never knew what hit them.

**Sarah.** You killed them?

**Parker.** Father always said I was too emotional. That's a little bit of an understatement, you see. I'm a bit more of a homicidal maniac. That's why I set the theater of fire.

**Sarah.** That's horrid!

**Parker.** I know, I could have been so much more imaginative. Like the time I put that little boy in the microwave.

**Sarah.** (Scared to death, she looks at her wrist, but there's no watch there.) I think my husband's home.

**Parker.** (Sips his tea again.) Invite him up sometime. We could sit around and gab and maybe go out on a shooting spree. What do you think?

**Sarah.** That'd be great. Bye! (She tears out of the house.)

**Parker.** (He closes the door.) Well, that got rid of her. (He pours her unfinished coffee down the sink.) I hate company. **UR**



ART BY JOSE LOTT

POEM BY JOSHUA LURIE-TERRELL

## a poem about whiskey

sometimes, i think i might  
love her, sometimes, i know i can't  
whenever i am excited i think of her  
and when i am sick, she is my nurse  
a secret lover  
a willful mother  
my death all at once, not noticing the truth  
she dances in the night  
away from me



PHOTO BY LORI JOHNSON



# A MESSAGE FROM THE UNIVERSE

**T**he consistent message from the universe to me during the past few years has been startlingly simple: *Don't wait.*

If you have something you need to say to someone: *Say it now.*

If there's something or someone you need to go see: *Go see it.*

If you're playing a waiting game, thinking life will remain on hold: *Give it up.*

It's hard to say how many times that message has been delivered to me graphically during the past six months, but when the phone rang a few days ago and it was one of my oldest friends calling from upstate New York, I heard the alarm going off on the Cosmic Clock, and knew why I had been so insistent on visiting he and his wife of 14 years last summer.

My friend, Douglas "Buddy" Hooper was "just calling up old friends," he said. And in his normal, taciturn way, it took about a minute or two for him to get it out: His wife had died three weeks before and, well, it was pretty strange to be living without her.

Douglas "Buddy" Hooper has always been a fixture of dinner-table talk in the Fitzgerald house. My children can recount many tales from my youth in which Hooper played Sancho Panza to my Don Quixote and many times vice-versa. In one memorable — if not infamous — incident, he drove his blue and white 1963 Chevy Impala like a missile through the wall of a dry-cleaner's, demolishing a cement block building in the process and nearly landing himself in jail. The anecdote always gets great laughs because Hooper's charmed life protected him from any real physical injury and the insurance company had to pay more to replace the ruined clothes than for damages done to a dozen or so parked cars — or the building.

We had many adventures and while there are many that I now wish I hadn't told my children about (*But you and Hooper did it*), Hooper and I became friends along with several others in kind of youthful micro-fraternity that

has endured a diaspora that began as soon as we graduated from high school. The friendship still remains potent enough, 30 years later, that I doubled over out of reflex at the news that Hooper's wife had had a massive heart attack and died.

I barely knew his wife, Ruth. I met her first in 1985 when I swooshed through my old hometown on a week-long whim of a visit. They were perfect together and I envied them the tranquility I saw and the pride of ownership of a small house on the side of a hill. My wild-man friend of youth seemed calmer than I ever remembered him. A year later, at our 20th high school reunion, Hooper was missing, though some of people who still lived in town said he was fine and he and Ruth were still acting like newlyweds eight years into their marriage. In the rush of everything I neglected to track him down.

Now, nearly 1992, the news of his wife's death was nearly as devastating as if Douglas "Buddy" Hooper had died of a heart attack himself. It was his pain I could feel and it reminded me — yet again

— that the friendship bonds formed so many years ago are still there, not even rusty, just temporarily forgotten like jewelry that's been worn an entire lifetime.

I was comforted when he told me that he was being well taken care of by other friends, much newer than our long-standing bond, friends who he worked with and lived with in the tiny town we grew up in. He ticked off the number of turkeys, pot roasts and pans of lasagna which had arrived and how he couldn't keep up with the invitations for dinner or visits or simple conversations with people he hadn't seen in years who just "dropped by."

He reminded me that if I ever needed *anything* from him to simply call. And if I needed his reassuring presence in California on short-notice demand, he would zoom in on the next flight to help me.

The night he called, there was a big Christmas cocktail party planned at the home of a woman affectionately known as Zsa Zsa, a woman who had been a good friend to Ruth during the past year

**"IT WAS HIS PAIN I COULD FEEL  
AND IT REMINDED ME -- YET  
AGAIN -- THAT THE FRIENDSHIP  
BONDS FORMED SO MANY YEARS  
AGO ARE STILL THERE."**

as Ruth's heart began to grow weaker and weaker. He was going to the party, but he felt strange, even though he would know nearly everyone in the room. Fourteen years of always having a date you loved safely tucked on your arm made going alone into a party like this an eerie thing to contemplate.

It was as eerie for me to hear it from Hooper, a man who used to walk into strange saloons at midnight and be instantly recognized and surrounded by a gaggle of friends all vying for the chance to buy him a drink. Yet I knew in that instant that he was also seeking

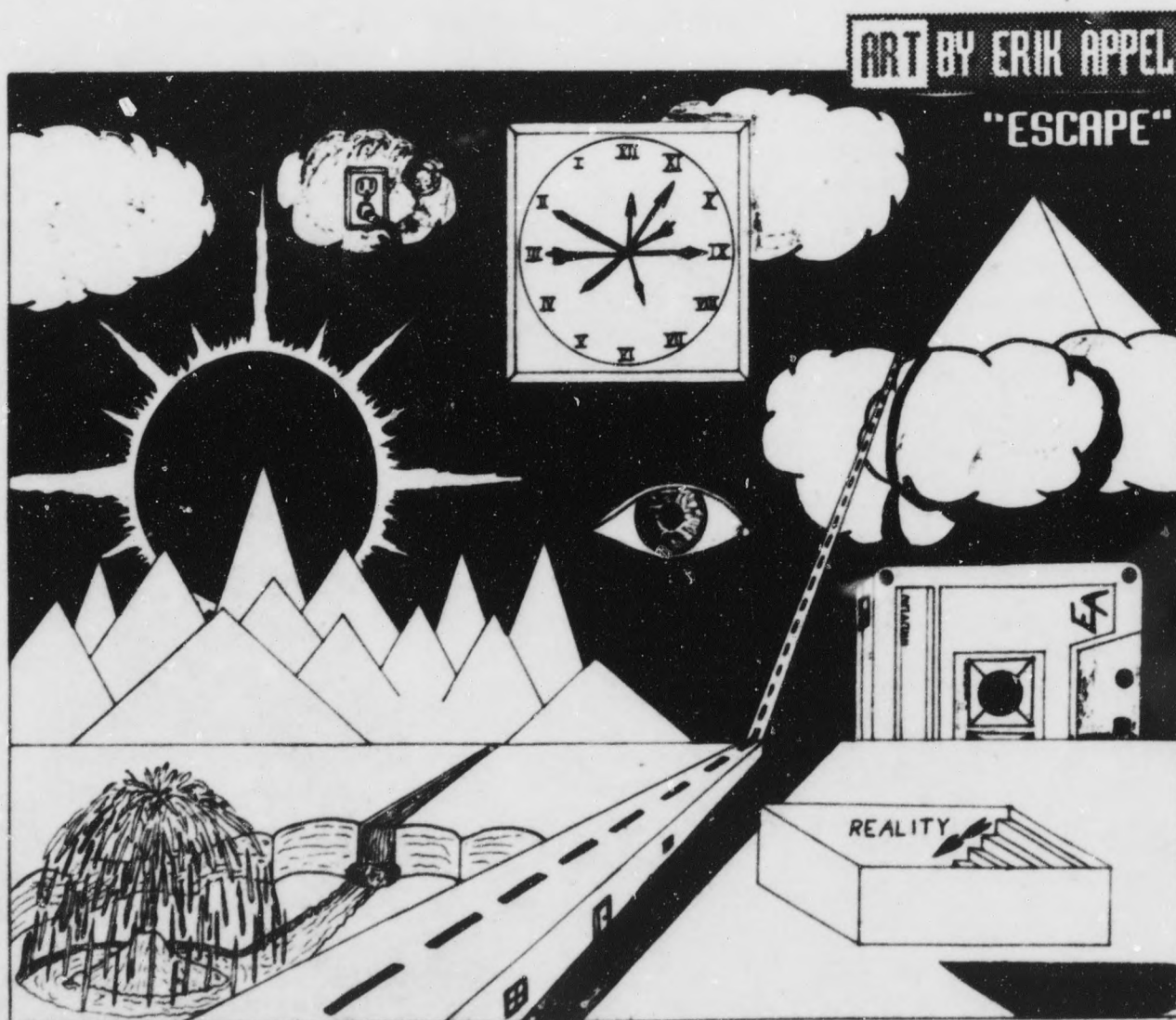
some kind of reassurance from me that going to this party — being around other women who were already circling him only three weeks after the death of his wife — that this all was real and within the bounds of some set of rules that neither he nor I really understood.

It was suddenly like being part of the Unholy Three again, a not-altogether flattering nickname my mother labeled the teenage alliance of Hooper, another friend and myself, all inseparable during our teenage years. By telephoning me, Hooper was sending out a message just the way the three of us did many nights at 2 a.m., standing in winter snowbanks outside our houses, chattering away on 500 milliwatt walkie-talkies, not because the three of us *really* had much to say, but because as friends we wanted to simply touch base, to reassure each other that the world was still there, the way we wanted it to be.

Hooper and I couldn't remember anyone else in our close acquaintanceship losing a spouse to Death. Certainly the specter of divorce had haunted our entire graduating class and the photos of couples attending the 10-year high school reunion only bore a passing resemblance to the pictures from the 25th. But death! Death was something we had been uneasily facing in our parents for some years now, but surely, surely not us, not our spouses.

Sweet Jesus, surely not our friends.

And the same moment, 3,000



ART BY ERIK APPEL

"ESCAPE"

See Faces, page 11



miles apart, Hooper and I realized that the third member of our triad had disappeared after the 20th high school reunion into the mists of his military career, with a wife neither of us really knew at all and children whose names we couldn't remember.

Worse, his mother had been diagnosed as having some kind of cancer, the deadly killer that shows no mercy, that takes no prisoners.

We're trying to track our friend *right now* because he needs to know that, despite the years and distance and divorces and anything else that might have been visited upon him, that we are here — that we will take to the air in a moment's notice — to comfort him, like our voices on the walkie-talkie at 2 a.m. that gave us reassurance that we were not alone, not one-of-a-kind in a world populated by strangers and people not your friends.

Perhaps tonight Douglas "Buddy" Hooper and I will step outside at 2 a.m. and place a call to our friend to let him know that we have looked into the many faces of death and found that as frightening as it is, if you know you have friends it's endurable.

We can't imagine what it would be like without them. **UR**

## Reaper, from page 7

a comment to the cute girl behind him, who laughed out loud. The driver took one last look at the boy picking up the remains of his bike, grinned, gunned the engine and sped off down the road.

The back tire was still rotating when he picked up his bike and righted it.

Pedaling home was a real chore, since his left ankle throbbed with every pump and his bike tire was slightly bent. He parked his bike in the garage and hobbled into the house. Like always, his mother was on the telephone, talking nonsense to a friend who probably wasn't listening.

Mike flopped onto the couch, forgetting the soda, and removed the books from his bag as he used the remote control to flip on the T.V. The news was on; the anchorman was talking about a train crash in Japan and a mud slide in Chile. He opened the horror collection and began to flip through the pages to see if any of the stories caught his attention.

The news commentator was now talking about the recent downtown bus strike. "...And, as of yet, no agreement has been reached between union organizers and management, and this just in..." As he continued his voice took on a distinctly British slant. "...Michael, isn't it about time? I mean really now, Michael."

The boy bolted from his place on the couch and snapped off the television. He sat in front of its blank screen, staring at it in disbelief. It stared back at him in ghoulish delight.

"Just what in the hell is going on here?" he stammered as he stumbled down the hall into his room. He slammed the door and leaned up against it, just to insure that no one had followed him.



PHOTO BY KAREN MISENER

## The Sorrows Of Fruitless Mulberries

POEM BY KEN KIEHN

*They stand like tributes to beauty  
stunted, tortured trees  
in front of identical triplexes  
made from the bones of other trees*

*and once a year  
a man comes  
and cuts  
arms from shoulders  
and never even thinks about it.*

*At night, when everyone sleeps,  
I dream they are screaming.  
Pain and fear,  
it's Auschwitz Street for them—  
arms cut, not once,  
but a dozen times,  
but they never stop branching out,  
never stop trying to grow majestic,  
and I admire them for that.*

He sat down at his desk and stared at his clock radio that seemed to loom up in front of him. "Do I dare turn it on?" he thought.

He flipped on the switch and the speakers pounded out some uselessly overplayed song. Relieved, he leaned in his chair and took a deep breath. Unfortunately for him, the song soon changed. The radio was now playing a song by some British group that Michael had never heard before, that as far as he could tell, was called "Michael, Isn't It Time?"

**"FOR THE FIRST TIME THAT DAY, HE REALLY LISTENED TO WHAT THE CALLER HAD TO SAY."**

With one swift motion, he pitched the radio out his open window and fled from his room and into the kitchen.

His mother was sitting on the barstool, her mouth still flapping in the same exaggerated form as before. "...And then Sharon told me that Robbin told her that if she didn't like it that way that she could just look for another best... Oh, hold on Char. There's a call on the other line." Michael watched as his mother pushed down the switch and said, "Hello?" She sat there for a moment, listening to the caller, then handed her ear away from the receiver, taking it to Michael.

"It's for you."

Michael slowly raised the phone, which by this time was almost hot from overuse, to his ear and for the first time that day, really listened to what the caller had to say.

After a few moments, Michael nodded dully, said, "OK, goodbye," and handed

the phone back to his mom. At this point, he turned towards the front door, opened it, and continued outside. As he walked toward the street he could see a car coming towards him in the distance, its radio blaring. Undoubtedly, the driver would not pay much attention to a little boy standing on the curb. It really doesn't matter though. He was right. It was time.

By this time, Michael's mom was continuing on her phone call. "...So I got the skirt for only half price. I know, isn't that just a scream?"

Suddenly, from somewhere outside, there was the sound of screaming brakes and some other sound that she couldn't distinguish. She hung up the phone and ran to the doorway to see the driver of a blue Chevy standing over her son, or what was left of him. The driver was screaming and crying at the same time, and inside the phone began to ring. **UR**



PHOTO BY PAT OLANDER

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